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Edward Heath, the Declaration of Perth and the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, 1966-1970¹

And so in this situation I turn again to our basic principles. We find there two important strands. The first is that we have long been the Party of Union. Our fundamental belief is in the destiny of the United Kingdom The second strand is our belief in the devolution of power.²

At the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party conference in Perth Assembly Rooms in May 1968, Edward Heath thus attempted to provide some intellectual framework for what was intended as a bold policy announcement: the Conservative proposition for an elected Scottish Assembly. The press met what almost immediately became known as the 'Declaration of Perth' with a mixture of constructive comment and mocking cynicism. Some commentators engaged with the policy and its intellectual justifications and congratulated Heath on a bold, if unrefined, attempt to meet a clear groundswell of support for changes to how Scotland was governed. Criticism was summed up by David Wood in the *Times*, who pilloried what he saw as a 'vote-grabbing stunt', a source of bitter intra-party contention and, in its presentation, 'a rather pathetic publicists' attempt to catch historic echoes from the Declaration of Arbroath'.³ In reality, what Heath had proposed at Perth was simply the establishment of a committee to discuss and report on the idea of a Scottish Assembly. Immediate confusion within both the parliamentary party and activists in Scotland revolved around exactly what *had* been proposed: was the speech intended as a 'proposal or a commitment'; was the committee to work out how best to establish a Scottish Assembly or to consider 'the desirability and advisability of the setting up in Scotland of such a body'?⁴ Perhaps more worryingly, similar questions were still being put by the proposed membership of the Constitutional Committee itself in August 1968.⁵ It was an inauspicious beginning.

The best and most detailed analysis of the genesis, presentation and fate of these Conservative proposals for devolution has been provided by James Mitchell. His account focuses on the tactical drivers behind Heath's

¹ I would like to thank Ewen Cameron, Matthew Cragoe, Robert Crowcroft, Alvin Jackson and Malcolm Petrie for reading and commenting on earlier drafts. Some of the research for this article was undertaken as a visiting fellow at the Humanities Research Centre, RSHA, Australian National University and I gratefully acknowledge this support.

² Bodleian Library [hereafter Bod. Lib.], Conservative Party Archive [hereafter CPA], CRD3/28/7, 'The Rt Hon. Edward Heath Speaking at the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Conference in Perth', 18 May 1968.

³ *The Times*, 8 July 1968.

⁴ National Library of Scotland [hereafter NLS], Scottish Conservative & Unionist Association Papers [hereafter SCUA], Acc.11368/79, Notes on discussion of Scottish Assembly proposals 7 June [1968] at the Central Council of the SCUA; Acc.11368/17, Minute of adjourned meeting of Glasgow Regional Council, 11 July 1968.

⁵ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/170, Prof. J. D. B. Mitchell to Alec Douglas-Home, n.d. [August 1968].

announcement, which is presented as an ill-starred attempt to play the 'Scottish card' in the context of an increasing electoral threat from the Scottish National Party (SNP). Heath's major failure was to carry his party with him to endorse a policy that masqueraded as a major shift in Conservative policy, but in reality represented little more than an extension of the Westminster committee system.⁶ Indeed, later critics could (retrospectively) paint the episode as an ill augury of what was to come, the first of a series of u-turns.⁷ Certainly few would now argue that the Declaration of Perth was anything but an abject failure. The Constitutional Committee to which it gave birth and which endorsed a Scottish 'Convention' sitting in Edinburgh and acting as a cross between a beefed-up Scottish Grand Committee and a third chamber of Parliament (scrutinizing, discussing and amending Scottish legislation) was adopted as official party policy for the 1970 election.

That nothing came of this pledge can partly be explained by a timeless dynamic identified in a contemporary pamphlet: 'Politicians concerned with Scotland are almost nationalistic when they are out of office: when they form a government they become obstinately and even blindly unionist'.⁸ Even if we accept that power made devolution far less appealing to Conservative politicians, arguably the Committee was swiftly overtaken by events well in advance of its report. The overlapping concerns of Harold Wilson's Royal Commission on the Constitution, established in 1969, and of the Conservatives' own actions on local government reform diluted the Committee's *raison d'être*. By 1970 the Scottish National Party success at the Hamilton by-election in 1967 seemed more like nationalism's apotheosis rather than the beginning of an existential threat to two-party politics.⁹ Events in the only part of the United Kingdom operating 'devolved' government – Northern Ireland – and the eventual prorogation of the Stormont Parliament raised fresh questions about the wisdom of the policy.¹⁰ The chaotic series of challenges that met Heath's government after 1970 administered the final blows and the official Conservative commitment to a Scottish Assembly died, unlamented by most, in 1973.

Nevertheless, increasingly nuanced histories of unionism in twentieth-century Britain should encourage historians to revisit the Declaration of Perth as a revealing episode in the history of Conservatism in Scotland. While recent work has in part rescued the Labour Party from the charge of political opportunism by placing Labour policies on devolution within wider intellectual and political horizons, such an exercise ought, if anything, to be easier for the

⁶ James Mitchell, *Conservatives and the Union: A Study of Conservative Party Attitudes to Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1990), pp. 52-68.

⁷ Ian Lang, *Blue Remembered Years: A Political Memoir* (London, 2002), p. 169.

⁸ H. J. Paton, *The Claim of Scotland* (London, 1968), p. 10.

⁹ Useful contemporary perspectives are found in James Kellas's treatment of Scottish nationalism in David Butler and Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, *The British General Election of 1970* (London, 1971), pp. 446-62; Iain McLean, 'The Rise and Fall of the SNP', *Political Studies*, 18 (1970), 357-72.

¹⁰ For the neglected history of Northern Ireland's role in discussion of Scottish government see Graham Walker, 'Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Devolution, 1945-1979', *Journal of British Studies*, 49 (2010), 117-42.

Conservative Party.¹¹ Indeed, this has partly been achieved and, in line with a more general rehabilitation of the historical study of Conservative ideas, historians have increasingly argued that the devolutionary pedigree of the Conservative and Unionist Party *did* provide some sound intellectual justification for the policy.¹² Within this revised historiography the Declaration of Perth can appear less as a starkly opportunistic ‘reversal of policy’ and more as ‘a missed opportunity to take a long-held commitment to administrative devolution all the way to a legislative end’.¹³

By examining in detail the evolution and reception of the Declaration of Perth between 1966 and 1970 this article in part aims to provide a more nuanced account of the policy, one that pays some attention to its roots within long-range histories of Conservatism/Unionism, but gives due weight to the interaction of these ideas with more immediate tactical, strategic and organizational issues.¹⁴ It attempts a more fully contextualized account of Conservative thinking and action on devolution and on Scotland at a specific historical moment. It thus differs from existing accounts from historians and political scientists, which almost exclusively examine the relationship between the Conservative Party and Scotland within a long-term perspective and through the lens of ‘decline’.¹⁵ Chronology is important in any such detailed analysis and the first part of this article establishes a timeline leading up to Heath’s speech at Perth. It is argued that, while the Conservatives *did* consider the apparent threat posed by nationalism both more seriously and more promptly than the Labour Party, as in the past it was electoral considerations that drove them to act. The account is, however, broadened out to incorporate a number of other contexts that help to explain the Declaration. First, it was part of a more compound sense of crisis in the late 1960s, ‘a moment when the moral coherence of the postwar era appeared to be in jeopardy’.¹⁶ As such, it was intimately linked to other areas of concern including not only Welsh nationalism, but also English nationalism and a

¹¹ Duncan Tanner, ‘Harold Wilson and Devolution, 1966-70: The Making of Government Policy’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 17 (2006), 545-78; Graham Walker, ‘John P. Mackintosh, Devolution and the Union’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 66 (2013), 557-78.

¹² See especially Matthew Cragoe, ‘“We like local patriotism”: The Conservative Party and the Discourse of Decentralisation, 1947-51’, *English Historical Review*, 122 (2007), 965-85; *idem*, ‘Defending the Nation: The Conservative Party and the Idea of Devolution, 1945-1974’, in Andrew Edwards and C. Williams (eds), *The Art of the Possible: Politics and Governance in Modern British History: Essays in Memory of Duncan Tanner* (forthcoming, Manchester, 2014); Alvin Jackson, *The Two Unions: Ireland, Scotland, and the Survival of the United Kingdom, 1707-2007* (2012), ch. 7; Catriona Macdonald, ‘More than a Name: The Union and the Un-doing of Scottish Conservatism in the Twentieth Century’, in David Torrance (ed.), *Whatever Happened to Tory Scotland?* (Edinburgh, 2012), pp. 43-61; Paul Ward, *Unionism in the United Kingdom, 1918-1974* (Basingstoke, 2005).

¹³ Mitchell, *Conservatives and the Union*, p. 56; Macdonald, ‘More than a Name’, p. 45.

¹⁴ Matthew Cragoe has come closest to providing this kind of account in ‘Defending the Nation’.

¹⁵ David Seawright and John Curtice, ‘The Decline of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party 1950-92: Religion, Ideology or Economics?’, *Contemporary British History*, 9 (1995), 319-42; Michael Dyer, ‘The Evolution of the Centre-right and the State of Scottish Conservatism’, *Political Studies*, 49 (2001), 30-50.

¹⁶ Camilla Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 19.

perceived disengagement and cynicism about all political activity. Second, the Declaration was characteristic of a unique period of Conservative policy-making and had an important context in organizational reforms and leadership attempts to rehabilitate Conservative fortunes in Scotland.

This last area is especially important. While the existing historiography is eloquent on how the Conservatives could arrive at such a policy, it is less convincing on why it proved such a tremendous flop within the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party. Certainly, there was a lack of consultation before the Declaration, but this was hardly unique during a period of restless policy-making. While some have discussed Conservative thinking on devolution alongside what Alvin Jackson describes as the 'clear evidence of organizational sclerosis' in the Scottish party, the crucial relationship between the two has been neglected.¹⁷ The second part of the article thus examines the responses to the Declaration and the Constitutional Committee by party members and activists in Scotland. It is in these responses and the bringing together of ideological and organizational perspectives that one of the 'ironies' of Conservative failure in Scotland is revealed. A policy explicitly aimed at decentralization of power to Scotland was driven by Conservatives in London and by the Scottish Central Office (SCO) in Edinburgh. At the same time increasing centralization of the party from the mid-1960s was alienating activists and supporters. Hence most criticism of the devolution policy within the Scottish party took the form of rejecting its development and presentation rather than its aims and language.

I

Establishing an accurate chronology and context for the Declaration of Perth is important, most especially as the timing and the manner in which the policy was developed became issues on which discussions within the party focused. Heath himself later gave one much-cited explanation, which established the context of "‘anti-system’ voting" and the 'tide of nationalistic sentiment' and cast devolution as a 'pressure valve for moderate nationalist aspirations':

Our party policy in March 1966 had been robustly opposed to the establishment of a Scottish assembly, a policy that I had inherited from a whole string of my predecessors ... But, in the light of the evident shift in opinion since that election, it would have been politically suicidal to stick to our guns. So, in June 1967, I set up a Scottish Policy Group with a completely open brief ... The suggestion for a Scottish Assembly would therefore come from the Scottish Conservative Party.¹⁸

Two key features of this narrative are worth underlining: first, the claim that Conservative policy represented a well-considered and intellectually consistent response to a wider crisis of politics in the late 1960s, which included Scottish and Welsh nationalism, but also the challenge represented

¹⁷ Jackson, *Two Unions*, pp. 262-4.

¹⁸ Edward Heath, *The Course of My Life: My Autobiography* (London, 1998), pp. 294-5.

by Enoch Powell's pronouncements on immigration and by a more pervasive sense of cynicism about formal politics; second, the insistence that the policy enshrined in the Declaration and the subsequent Constitutional Committee was emphatically *not* a knee-jerk response to the result of the Hamilton by-election. Heath thus retrospectively answered criticism which had emerged from the press and from within the party at the time that the Conservatives had been 'panicked' into support for a measure of devolution.¹⁹

Needless to say, this narrative was only partially accurate. Indeed, Heath did acknowledge that disastrous electoral performances in Scotland in 1964 (when the Party lost seven seats) and 1966 (when it lost a further four) had both stimulated significant rethinking on the party's position in Scotland. One result in 1965 had been a sweeping reorganization aimed at professionalizing what was seen (from the perspective of London) as a creaking and antiquated party machinery, 'all terribly feudal' in the words of one London Central Office figure.²⁰ These moves to centralization were capped by a presentational centralization, which saw the historic name of Scottish Unionist Party ditched in favour of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party.²¹ Such efforts were revisited after 1966, as part of a more general reorganization of party machinery and strategy, which included 'Project '67' and efforts to exert greater central control of candidate selection and to coordinate interventions in 'critical seats'.²² This sense of restless change within the Scottish party had important implications for the reception of Heath's announcement.

The 1966 election also provided ample reasons for the Conservatives to take seriously the increased visibility and ambitions of the Scottish National Party. The SNP had doubled its vote and fielded twenty-three candidates and an additional stimulus was provided by the victory of Gwynfor Evans at the Carmarthen by-election in July 1966.²³ Such electoral warnings were to continue and even victories could give pause for thought. At the Glasgow Pollok by-election in March 1967, the strong SNP intervention ended up assisting the return of Esmond Wright for the Conservatives by reducing the Labour share of the vote by over twenty per cent. It also, however, reduced the Conservative share of the vote by over ten per cent and was at least partially responsible for Wright's highlighting of the Conservative record of administrative devolution and his later support for further measures.²⁴

The tactical picture both at this stage and subsequently was not one solely concerned with the nationalist threat, but also with how other parties

¹⁹ Powell's famous 'rivers of blood' speech had been delivered on 20 Apr. 1968 and was discussed alongside Scottish nationalism in Heath, *Course of My Life*, pp. 290-4.

²⁰ Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky, *General Election of 1970*, p. 100.

²¹ David Seawright, *An Important Matter of Principle: The Decline of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party* (Aldershot, 1999), chs 1, 7.

²² Tim Bale, *The Conservatives since 1945: Drivers of Party Change* (Oxford, 2012), ch. 4; David Butler and Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, *The British General Election of 1970* (London, 1971), pp. 94-110.

²³ Peter Lynch, *SNP: The History of the Scottish National Party* (Cardiff, 2002), ch. 5.

²⁴ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/91, Campaign material for Pollok by-election; James Mitchell, 'Scottish Nationalism and Devolution', in Peter Dorey (ed.), *The Labour Governments 1964-1970* (London, 2006), pp. 196-7.

responded to the changing environment. Among the Conservatives' four losses in 1966 were two to Labour candidates who would become standard-bearers for that party's approach to devolution (Donald Dewar in Aberdeen South and J. P. Mackintosh in East Lothian and Berwick). After Orpington, the Liberals also loomed larger in Conservative minds. Since their wipeout at the 1945 general election the Liberals had moved to five seats in Scotland by 1966, a net gain won at the expense of the Conservatives. A Liberal candidate who both exemplified his party's newly youthful appeal and made much of its commitment to federalism and the devolution of power, David Steel, extended his majority in Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles, having won it from the Conservatives at a by-election in March 1965.²⁵ With Liberals ever more ready to trumpet their commitment to devolution and to explore 're-alignment', through agreements with both Labour and the SNP, they formed part of Conservative electoral calculus.²⁶ Indeed, it is likely that strong Liberal presence and traditions in the north-east of Scotland helped move Conservatives to devolutionary positions.²⁷ James Kellas rightly pointed to the 'all-pervading Scottish national consciousness in every sector of public and private life' as one appealed to by all parties. Where to position itself within this shifting marketplace was a key aspect of Conservative thinking.

Such concerns about electoral decline and about the relative positions of other parties were central to the Conservative Research Department's (CRD) report into 'Nationalism and Regionalism' in 1966. The electoral rationale and 'the recurring fear of a rash of Celtic Orpingtons' was made clear in a paper littered with question marks about the nationalist phenomenon. It raised the key issues with which the Conservatives would grapple over the subsequent decade. First, 'Is there a Conservative Answer to the Political Appeal of the Nationalists?' and 'Is it a weakness that we do not make a specifically nationalist appeal in Wales and Scotland?' Second, what was the relationship between these problems and current interest in 'regionalism' in the form of territorially distinctive economic policies. The key problematic here was how far nationalism could be met by changes to local government and rolled into a UK-wide policy or whether something more targeted – 'an opium for disenchanted Celts' – was required.²⁸

This report marked the beginning of a serious engagement by the central organs of the Conservative Party with nationalism and the attempt to understand its implications for the party's electoral prospects and policies in the 1960s and beyond. Such engagement did not, of course, emerge *ex nihilo* and the Conservative Party had a variety of intellectual traditions on which it could draw. Both Irish and imperial issues from the 1880s onwards had prompted a flurry of thinking about the nature of the union-state and its

²⁵ Mitchell, 'Scottish nationalism', p. 206; David Torrance, *David Steel: Rising Hope to Elder Statesman* (London, 2012), pp. 24-9.

²⁶ *Glasgow Herald*, 10 June and 20 and 21 Sept. 1968; Vernon Bogdanor, *Devolution in the United Kingdom* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 128-30.

²⁷ See for example the resolution in NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/38, North East Regional Council, 11 Feb. 1967.

²⁸ Bod. Lib., CPA, SUMC(66)8, 'Nationalism and Regionalism', 26 July 1966.

governance, which included, for example, the Round Table Movement and federalist or 'home rule all round' solutions.²⁹

In the Scottish context, Unionists had been successful for much of the twentieth century not only in their effective deployment of the language of Scottish nationality, but also in their leadership of the reform of Scottish government and administration. The Conservatives had acted as the midwife to the Scottish Office in 1885 and during the interwar period it was Unionists who led the way in deepening and broadening administrative devolution.³⁰ After 1945, the party had responded quickly and creatively to the apparent nationalist threat represented by the Covenant movement, by proposing and then implementing further reforms, which dovetailed neatly with wider arguments about localism and decentralization.³¹ All of these measures were developed within a framework in which the maintenance of the Union and of the pre-eminence of the Westminster Parliament were central, but they furnished a plausible set of precedents from which Conservatives might take the lead in reforming Scottish institutions. Indeed, they were traditions that were specifically referenced in the historical section of Heath's speech at Perth.³² That Heath and others felt it necessary to remind the Party of these precedents, however, may help to explain some of the mixed responses to the Declaration. Similarly, the existence of these traditions is not, in itself, an adequate explanation for Conservative actions in the late 1960s. As Cragoe has lucidly demonstrated much more attention needs to be paid to the *interaction* between ideas about devolution and decentralization and policy positions which were 'always, at root, a calculation made with an eye to electoral success'.³³

Additionally, such efforts need to be seen within the context of the distinctive Conservative approach to opposition and policy-making during the period 1964 to 1970. The proliferation of policy groups after 1964, whose reports were to populate the 1966 manifesto, was one shift, in part designed to provide new policies for an increasingly volatile electorate. After the general election many policy groups were reconvened and others were established. They have come to be seen as 'the hallmark of the Heath leadership as a whole', a fitting token of his aspirations to managerialize and professionalize

²⁹ Philip Lynch, *Sovereignty, Britishness and Conservative Politics* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 15-19; J. E. Kendle, 'The Round Table Movement and "Home Rule All Round"', *Historical Journal*, 11 (1968), 332-53.

³⁰ James Mitchell, *Governing Scotland: The Invention of Administrative Devolution* (Basingstoke, 2003), chs 2, 6-7.

³¹ See, for example, NLS, SCUA, Acc. 11368/80, Papers on Scottish Nationalism, which include correspondence relating to and drafts of the official Unionist pamphlet, *Scotland and the United Kingdom: The Unionist Party's Practical Policy for Scottish Administration of Scottish Affairs and Scotland's Part in Great Britain* (Edinburgh, 1948); Cragoe, "'We like local patriotism'"; Ian Levitt, 'Britain, the Scottish Covenant Movement and Devolution, 1946-50', *Scottish Affairs*, 22 (1998), 33-57.

³² Bod. Lib., CPA, CRD3/28/7, 'The Rt Hon. Edward Heath Speaking at the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Conference in Perth', 18 May 1968.

³³ Cragoe, 'Defending the Nation'.

policy-making and, latterly government.³⁴ Outside of a few key areas, however, such as taxation and trade union law, the approach was far more chaotic and hand-to-mouth, with many policies made 'on the hoof by the leader'.³⁵ A further aspect of this overhaul of the party was a much more substantial engagement with polling and the ruthless identification of target seats and a 'critical seats engagement scheme' to win these over. This latter included the targeting of advertising revenue and the mandating of cabinet visits.³⁶ These contexts help to explain the distinctive Conservative approach to devolution every bit as much as pre-existing ideological currents.

The general questions of the first report in 1966 were followed by the commissioning of professional research to provide a more solid basis on which to proceed. A statistically-based interview study from the Opinion Research Centre (ORC) was produced for Conservative Central Office (CCO) in November 1966.³⁷ It was, nevertheless, more direct electoral pressures that turned the aspirations to research and inform into a concern to make policy.

II

It was the immediate aftermath of the Hamilton by-election in November 1967 that saw both an assessment of the electoral implications of a strong SNP showing and moves towards generating and formalizing a Conservative policy on devolution. As electoral prospects were weighed up, Scottish nationalism was now decisively decoupled from its Welsh counterpart in this research for the simple reason identified by Cragoe: the Conservatives had less to lose and less to win in Wales than in Scotland.³⁸ Research flowed into CCO and estimates of the electoral dimension projected that if the SNP fought all the Scottish seats and took votes away from Labour and Conservative candidates in the same proportion as they had at Hamilton and that there was a uniform swing from Labour to the Conservatives, both of the established parties would be decimated in Scotland.³⁹ It was an unlikely prediction, but demonstrates how the febrile context of the winter of 1967-8 was concentrating minds. The Labour Party was, albeit more slowly, considering similar doomsday scenarios.⁴⁰

³⁴ Mark Garnett, 'Planning for Power: 1964-1970', in Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon (eds), *Recovering Power: The Conservatives in Opposition since 1867* (Basingstoke, 2005), p. 205; Bale, *Conservatives since 1945*, pp. 120-9.

³⁵ John Campbell, *Edward Heath: A Biography* (London, 1993), p. 218.

³⁶ Bale, *Conservatives since 1945*, pp. 114-20; Garnett, 'Planning' p. 200; Campbell, *Edward Heath*, p. 215; Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky, *General Election of 1970*, pp. 288-91, 312-13.

³⁷ Bod. Lib., CPA, CCO500/50/1, 'Special Attitudes in Scotland, Wales and the West Country', Nov. 1966.

³⁸ Cragoe, 'Defending the Nation'.

³⁹ Bod. Lib., CPA, CCO 500/50/1, 'Hamilton By-Election', 6 Nov. 1967; Memorandum from Tommy Thompson to Anthony Barber 'The Implications of the Nationalist win at Hamilton', n.d. [Nov. 1967]; CRD3/28/6, 'Estimate of the Electoral Effects of the Rise of the Scottish National Party in Scotland since the 1966 General Election', 26 Feb. 1968. The report gave the figures as SNP 47, Conservatives 12, Labour 8, Liberals 4.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Crossman's predictions that the SNP challenge 'may well lost us half the Scottish seats in the next election', Richard Crossman, *Diaries of a Cabinet Minister Volume Three: Secretary of State for Social Services* (London, 1977), p. 82.

After Hamilton the move towards action was immediate and came from the top. A secret meeting was held at Heath's Albany flat on 16 November 1967. It agreed on one overriding strategic imperative that would shape Conservative policy to 1970: 'to show that we accepted that Scotland had protested against the present situation – had risen in dissent, but that we were the Party who was going to take note of this protest and meet the justifiable grievances of the Scots'. There followed thirteen action points, ranging from a concerted press campaign against the SNP to plans for Michael Noble to wine and dine Scottish editors and for Heath to give occasional drinks to the Scottish members, one of those convivial efforts to 'bridge the social gap between the leader and his party'.⁴¹

One substantial move was the commissioning of new market research and polling, especially in target seats.⁴² This came from the ORC in March 1968 and proceeded via the method of small 'discussion groups'. In line with the electoral strategy, this was focused on Scotland's 'critical seats', with groups convened in West Aberdeenshire, West Renfrew, Glasgow Woodside and Kelvingrove and Berwick and East Lothian and East Dunbarton. Of these, only the last was not on CCO's list of nine critical seats (and was contested in 1970 by Barry Henderson of SCO, which might have been one reason for its inclusion).⁴³ The eventual report was a damning indictment of the Conservative Party in Scotland – 'the only Scottish Party which, on mention, often elicited mirthful or mirthless laughter' – which suggested that nothing but a complete and radical restructuring could rescue its fortunes. This report clearly did have some impact on strategy – echoes of its recommendation to stress 'world trends towards economic interdependence' were present in Heath's speech at Perth, for example – and most importantly it confirmed the direction in which policy was precipitately moving:

What does emerge from the research is that the desire for a greater say by Scotland in her own affairs, greater autonomy of some sort, runs right through the nation. Even anti-nationalists who are still loyal to the Conservative Party share this feeling in a subdued form.⁴⁴

More substantially, George Younger was to oversee the policy group on Scottish government and to ensure 'that it should press ahead as quickly as possible with its work, and should report within six months time'.⁴⁵ This was asking a great deal. The group's first meeting would not occur until 14 December 1967. Although the SCUA had passed a resolution in favour of such a group in June 1967 and for some months there had been discussions

⁴¹ Campbell, *Edward Heath*, p. 216.

⁴² Bod. Lib., CPA, CRD3/28/6, 'Scottish Nationalism: Points of Action Agreed at the Meeting held at Albany on 16 November 1967'.

⁴³ Bod. Lib., CPA, CRD3/28/6, Humphrey Taylor to Sir Michael Fraser, 29 Feb. 1968.

⁴⁴ Bod. Lib., CPA, CCO500/50/1, 'The Motivations behind Scottish Nationalism', Mar. 1968, pp. 4, 28, 32.

⁴⁵ Bod. Lib., CPA, CRD3/28/6, 'Scottish Nationalism: Points of Action'; CRD 3/28/7, Government of Scotland Policy Group Members, 11 Jan. 1968.

drifting towards some action on regional policy and devolution no official group was either constituted or met until *after* Hamilton.⁴⁶

The policy group thus worked very quickly. Heath made it clear following a disappointing visit to Scotland in late January that on each of three subsequent visits to Scotland across the year he wished to make 'major policy pronouncements', with the principal one on devolution at the Scottish party's conference: 'It was therefore imperative that the Group should work at top speed.'⁴⁷ The group was thus encouraged to produce (and did produce) an interim report by April, which would allow any announcement to clear cabinet discussion ahead of Perth. Its own terms of reference and methods of working indicate how fluid and unformed the concept of 'devolution' as policy was at this stage. The group rapidly considered and rejected what it took to be three existing frameworks – separatist, federal and 'Stormont' – within which the government of Scotland might be remodeled. It then sketched out (quite literally) the plan for an elected Assembly that would furnish Heath's Perth speech.⁴⁸

When it came to consideration of the proposals, three sorts of analysis – intellectual, tactical, presentational – were combined. Peter Goldman's separate report was rare in pointing out a devolutionary policy as having the potential to be seen as 'an opportunistic *volte-face*' given that 'the broad history and tradition of the Party are anti-*"home rule"*'. His report clearly envisaged something more substantial – full legislative devolution – and welcomed this as a potential political masterstroke: 'For Conservatives to become advocates and later architects of home rule, thus spiking the guns of Socialists, Liberals and Nationalists alike, is the most dramatic step we could take to retrieve this strength.'⁴⁹ Others tended to stress that the group's recommendations be presented as 'part of the broad evolution of our existing policy' allied to administrative devolution and to local government reform.⁵⁰ Other considerations were more ruthlessly tactical and in presenting his assessment of the proposals to cabinet, the Scottish Secretary's first conclusion was based on very short-term considerations: 'The Socialists got a universally bad press in Scotland by refusing at their Conference last month even to contemplate change.'⁵¹

There was, therefore, awareness that, while tactical opportunities required the production of policy at high speed, this in itself presented considerable presentational problems. Indeed, cooler heads, among which

⁴⁶ Bod. Lib., CPA, CRD3/28/7, Michael Noble to Edward Heath, 31 Oct. 1967; John MacGregor to Sir Michael Fraser, 16 Oct. 1967.

⁴⁷ Bod. Lib., CPA, CRD3/28/6, 'Note on decisions taken at a meeting on future Scottish projects in Mr Heath's room in the House of Commons on Thursday 1st February 1968', 8 Feb. 1968; CRD3/28/7, Edward Heath to William McEwan Younger, 26 Feb. 1968; Gilmour Menzies Anderson to Edward Heath, 26 Apr. 1968.

⁴⁸ Bod. Lib., CPA, CRD3/28/7, 'Government of Scotland Policy Group: Interim Report', 28 Apr. 1968. The Policy Group worked up a number of diagrams to illustrate the relationship between the proposed Assembly and Westminster.

⁴⁹ Bod. Lib., CPA, CRD3/28/7, Peter Goldman, 'Government of Scotland', 1 May 1968.

⁵⁰ Bod. Lib., CPA, CRD3/28/7, R. D. Kernohan, 'Government of Scotland', 6 May 1968.

⁵¹ Bod. Lib., CPA, LCC(68)182, Michael Noble 'Machinery of Government – Scotland', 3 May 1968.

was that of Brendon Sewill of the CRD, warned that if the proposals did not at least bear the appearance of having been thoroughly thought through then there was considerable danger that they would look 'like a gimmick'. He informed Heath that NOP polls for February and April showed the SNP on a level of support well below that at which the CRD would consider it moving 'from being a minor irritant to being a major threat' and which it had been polling after Hamilton: 'This perhaps suggests that we should not be panicked into any rush move which we might later regret.'⁵² It was a dilemma shared by the Labour party in the months after Hamilton and Harold Wilson similarly warned: 'Obviously we must not panic, or be seen to be reacting to recent events'.⁵³ While Wilson slowly oversaw the development of a strategy, restrained in part by the strong opposition to devolution among senior figures within the Scottish Labour movement, it was characteristic of Heath in opposition to tilt at a 'gap in the market' and attempt a bold policy announcement.⁵⁴

III

Presentational issues came to the fore immediately following Heath's speech. Some colleagues were happy enough to congratulate him for having 'got in ahead of the Socialists' and, indeed, the speech at Perth received a backhanded compliment from Richard Crossman, battling to shape his own party's response to Scottish nationalism: 'it is a Conservative concession to nationalism and it is cunning that he has managed to get it in before the Government.'⁵⁵ Others further strengthened the intellectual case and in one paper, circulated to the shadow cabinet, the historian Robert Blake began with Lord Carnarvon's far-seeing Conservative support for home rule in the 1880s to make the point: 'The proposals adumbrated in Mr Heath's speech ... constitute a possible remedy which is quite consistent with the Conservative tradition and in no way destroys the principle of the Union.'⁵⁶

A substantial problem remained. While the genesis and execution of the 'policy' unveiled at Perth had been a frothy admixture of both short and longer term tactical considerations as well as both sustained and recent engagement with questions of the machinery of government, decentralization and regionalism, there had been little effort to consult the party in Scotland. Certainly few outside of the SCO in Edinburgh had any intelligence of the ongoing discussion. Over the summer the Constitutional Committee was put together while the policy group could continue its work at a more leisurely pace. Even the composition of the Committee was not without incident, the

⁵² Bod. Lib., CPA, CRD3/28/7, Brendon Sewill to Barry Henderson, 6 May 1968; Brendon Sewill to Edward Heath, 3 May 1968.

⁵³ NLS, Arthur Woodburn Papers, Acc.6276/2, Harold Wilson to Arthur Woodburn, 6 Nov. 1967.

⁵⁴ Kenneth Roy, *The Invisible Spirit: A Life of Post-War Scotland, 1945-1975* (Prestwick, 2013), p. 277.

⁵⁵ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/167, Earl of Dundee to Edward Heath, 18 May 1968; Crossman, *Diaries*, p. 69.

⁵⁶ Bod. Lib., CPA, LCC(68)187, Robert Blake, 'Scottish Nationalism', 5 June 1968.

initial appointment of Lord Avonside ensuring a nasty spat in the press over how appropriate it was to have judges serving on such bodies.⁵⁷ The Committee was given clear terms of reference, with the leading aim to 'keep the United Kingdom united' and met for the first time on 13 September 1969. Over the following sixteen meetings, the Committee followed the grooves of the policy group by considering and rejecting independence, 'federalism' and a Stormont-style solution and published its report in March 1970.⁵⁸

One dissenting member of the policy group summed up the challenge that faced the party and, to a lesser extent, the Committee: 'Major constitutional reforms cannot of course be based merely upon party advantages and must have national support. But one party will be in the difficult position of having to persuade its members to allow them to be carried out.'⁵⁹ One key part of this effort at persuasion was to address the issue of presentation. As has been established, nothing that could reasonably be called a policy group began work before December 1967. Nevertheless, it formed an important part of the later presentation of devolution plans to the shadow cabinet, to the public at Perth and crucially to the party in Scotland that policy group discussions on Scotland's government were instituted *before* Hamilton, in June 1967. Additionally, the mantra was repeated that the discussion had been initiated by the party in Scotland rather than CCO in London. Noble's paper for the shadow cabinet in May 1968 put it succinctly: 'A fairly broad-based Committee was set up in June 1967 – long before Hamilton – to consider and report. They have worked hard and long and have now come up with an interim report.'⁶⁰ They may have worked hard; they certainly had not worked long. It was the line taken by Heath in his speech at Perth and by subsequent attempts to defend the speech to the parliamentary party, activists in Scotland and the wider public.⁶¹ Such pleas were matched by letters to the press, which placed the mature consideration of Scotland's government before the Hamilton result.⁶² George Younger and other members of the SCO busily toured regional councils pushing the same message, while Heath met with Scottish Conservatives in September in an attempt to better explain and defend the policy.⁶³ That Younger and others were still pressing this chronology in letters to newspapers on the release of the Committee's report in 1970 does rather suggest that these efforts were less than successful.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ *Times*, 26, 27, 30 July and 6 Aug. 1968; Roy, *Invisible Spirit*, pp. 378-80.

⁵⁸ *Scotland's Government: The Report of the Scottish Constitutional Committee* (Edinburgh, 1970).

⁵⁹ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/79, Memorandum of reservations and dissent by W. A. Elliot QC, 26 Sept. 1968.

⁶⁰ Bod. Lib., CPA, LCC(68)182, Michael Noble, 'Machinery of Government – Scotland', 3 May 1968.

⁶¹ See, for example, NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/79, William McEwan Younger, 'Machinery of Government: Scotland'; Acc.11368/170 William McEwan Younger to Alec Douglas-Home, 2 July 1968.

⁶² See, for example, letter in the *Times* from Michael Noble and Gilmour Menzies Anderson, 10 July 1968.

⁶³ Douglas Hurd, *Memoirs* (London, 2003), pp. 192-3.

⁶⁴ *Daily Telegraph*, 26 Mar. 1970; *Glasgow Herald*, 27 Mar. 1970.

While Ian Lang was certainly right that there had been little (indeed there had been little time for) consultation *before* Heath flew his kite at Perth, there was plentiful consultation after the event, though this occurred within some preordained limits.⁶⁵ Indeed, one of the principal functions of the Committee was to consult widely and consider evidence from constitutional experts, business interests, key Scottish institutions and, importantly, the Scottish party itself. In particular, the members of the Committee received the answers to three papers sent out by SCO to canvas responses on the 'principles', the 'composition' and the 'powers' of the proposed Scottish Assembly from constituency associations and branches.⁶⁶

Such papers provide a fascinating insight into the range of positions within the Party in Scotland. Certainly we should be sceptical about Heath's later claims that 'it was from the grass roots that the demands came that we should re-examine the whole of the government of Scotland'.⁶⁷ We should also pause, however, before thinking of devolution policy as something unwelcome foisted upon an unyieldingly 'unionist' grassroots or on a membership unwilling to discuss such issues. The press tended to concentrate on the divisive impact of devolution. The *Glasgow Herald*, for example, quickly published survey evidence after Heath's speech suggesting that sixty-two per cent of Glasgow's Conservatives were in favour of either no change or greater local or regional freedom.⁶⁸ What the latter phrase masked was that in the Conservative Party (as in all political parties in the 1960s and 70s) there existed a range of opinions on the government of Scotland. The policy group's own digest of the responses to the questionnaire was broadly accurate in reporting that:

The majority of reports received accept the principle of a Scottish Assembly as proposed at Perth but there is a clear body of opinion opposed to it. This body is almost equally divided into two camps at opposite ends of the opinion spectrum. There is almost unanimous acceptance that some changes are needed in the institutions of government.⁶⁹

The policy group thus rightly presented Conservative opinion in Scotland as a spectrum. It is significant that very few responses sought to make a case that devolution was something that Conservatives could not consistently do or was ideologically objectionable. Few rejected Heath's proposals on the basis of the kind of 'Whig assimilationist' unionism that would come to characterize later Conservative (especially Thatcherite) approaches to Scotland.⁷⁰ The

⁶⁵ Lang, *Blue Remembered Years*, p. 167.

⁶⁶ The content of these papers can be seen from NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/167, 'Reply to questionnaire on the proposed Scottish Assembly by Torrance and Baldernock Branch of West Stirlingshire CUA', n.d..

⁶⁷ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 922, 16 Dec. 1976, 1780.

⁶⁸ *Glasgow Herald*, 17 June 1968.

⁶⁹ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/79, 'Scottish Assembly – summary of reports received in response to questionnaires circulated throughout the Party by Central Office', Dec. 1968.

⁷⁰ Jackson, *Two Unions*, pp. 265-8; William L. Miller, 'The Death of Unionism?', in T. M. Devine (ed.), *Scotland and the Union 1707-2007* (Edinburgh, 2008), pp. 175-92.

outlines of this position were, however, evident in some responses from disgruntled MPs. Indeed, on the eve of the Perth speech Jock Bruce-Gardyne mapped out the territory in an article in the *Spectator*. The Scots were nationalist, but not in any sense fundamentally different from the English:

We are turning to the SNP because the United Kingdom has ceased to satisfy us as a focus of national pride ... two possible answers would appear relevant. One, of course, is the Scottish Nationalist answer. But the other is not some intermediate solution masquerading under the slogan of devolution. It is, quite simply, to reestablish belief and pride in Great Britain.⁷¹

Such assimilationist voices were rare, though they were raised. Herbert Bonar, for example offered these sentiments: 'As a business man I am a Briton and not a Scotsman and might add that in private life this is also true. I utterly deplore the present trend towards fragmentation in nationalities at a time when the only hope for the future of the world lies in the reverse direction.'⁷² Similarly, a note from an Englishman living in Glasgow was premised on an inflexible unionism, arguing that the whole discussion of nationalism had woken up English opinion to the large subsidies given to the Scots: 'Further independence or devolution or whatever is unacceptable, unless it is total.'⁷³ Others dismissed devolution out of hand as not relevant, echoing Bruce-Gardyne's concerns that nationalism in Scotland was only a local symptom of a pan-British malaise. The Young Conservatives of West Edinburgh, for example, suggested: 'the whole scheme should be scrapped ... the Conservative Party should get back to old Conservative principles of security abroad and stability at home ... Nothing should be done which would upset the unity of Great Britain.'⁷⁴ Hillhead Women's Advisory Committee were even more curt: 'get Good Govt. – get Country back on its feet – re-establish pride in Britain and make Scotland feel part of Britain.'⁷⁵

A more common framework for the rejection of or scepticism towards Heath's proposals was to argue that a Scottish Assembly was simply unnecessary, because the mechanisms and powers to recognize and to address Scottish discontents already existed. At one extreme, this could be argued by means of a kind of 'analytic unionism' that Kidd has identified as very close to nationalism in some of its concerns.⁷⁶ The most fully realized criticism from this angle came from J. H. Macpherson of Newtonmore, whose trenchant statement was accompanied by supporting papers of various descriptions. He based his case on the argument that 'The "Permanent"

⁷¹ Jock Bruce-Gardyne, 'We're all nationalists now', *Spectator*, 16 May 1968, pp. 7-8.

⁷² NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/167, 'A Note by Sir Herbert Bonar', n.d..

⁷³ National Library of Australia [hereafter NLA], Sir Robert Menzies Papers, MS4936/24/450, R. A. Hawksworth, 'A Note', n.d..

⁷⁴ NLA, Menzies Papers, MS4936/24/450, 'Report on Proposals for the Scottish Assembly from West Edinburgh CUA', n.d..

⁷⁵ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/167, 'Note by Hillhead Conservative Association Women's Advisory Committee', n.d..

⁷⁶ Kidd, *Union and Unionisms*, ch. 3.

Clauses in the Treaty of Union provide against each and every grievance that is voiced by the Nationalists'. In short, while accepting there were problems with both the Conservative Party's performance north of the border and a climate of Scottish discontent, his remedy was very different from Heath's:

The Tory party has it in its power to sweep Scotland, if it can bring itself to show clearly in actions rather than in words, "We are the Unionists. We stand for the Union. Our policy is to ensure that the terms of the Union are enforced. Do this now, and all may yet be well. Leave it, and we can say goodbye to Great Britain and to all pride in the concept of "Britain" and "British".'⁷⁷

More common was the acknowledgement that problems existed, of which nationalism was a symptom, but that the proposed solution was simply too dangerous and sweeping. Wilfred Baker (MP for Banffshire), for example, assured Michael Noble that, while he would not rock the boat, his reservations were serious: 'There can be no half-way house between complete independence for Scotland – which we all abhor – and the present, though modified system of central government ... I see the proposal as the beginning of the break-up of the United Kingdom.'⁷⁸ Such criticisms often rested on the idea that similar aims might be achieved by far less hazardous means. Ian Lang, then a prospective candidate in Central Ayrshire, rejected the idea of constitutional experimentation to build 'a half-way house; and one built at the top of a slippery slope.' The solution to those problems, which Lang agreed to exist, was threefold: local government reform, further measures of administrative devolution, and the Scottish Grand Committee to meet in Edinburgh three times a year. The credentials of this latter body were to be enhanced by 'an element of ceremony' including a special service by the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and an official opening by the Queen.⁷⁹

Also prominent in the responses were variations on Lang's theme that, while an Assembly might be unnecessary, something needed to be *seen* to be done. This could take the form of either greater administrative devolution or better publicity for and use of that already attained: 'some devolution of Government in Scotland is essential, but ... this can be achieved through widening the existing scope and sphere of influence of St Andrews House.'⁸⁰ Such approaches could also be based on the idea that dissatisfaction came from the accumulation of small emotional grievances that required cosmetic alterations. This theme ran through a number of responses and formed part of Selby Wright's contribution as a member of the Committee, where he argued for action on perennial sore points such as the use of 'English' for 'British' by

⁷⁷ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/167, J. H. Macpherson 'The Anglo-Scottish Treaty of Union (1707)', July 1968.

⁷⁸ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/167, Wilfred H. K. Baker to Michael Noble, 10 July 1968.

⁷⁹ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/167, 'Memorandum on Devolution for the consideration of the Constitutional Committee, by Ian Lang', 9 Oct. 1968.

⁸⁰ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/170, South Western Region to Alec Douglas-Home, n.d. [Oct. 1968].

the BBC and the use of the English royal standard which were 'psychologically and emotionally important'.⁸¹

At the other end of the spectrum were those disappointed responses from groups and individuals who believed that the Perth proposals did not go far enough. Most of these supported the work of the Committee, but voiced misgivings about the scope of reform. Prominent here was the Thistle Group, which had formed in November 1967. This ginger group of mainly younger Edinburgh-university educated Conservatives, quickly came to support a position of 'federalism' (or more accurately of 'home rule all round') encompassing local legislatures throughout the UK with wide-ranging financial powers. This they laid out to the Committee in both written and oral evidence, while welcoming Heath's proposals as a 'staging post' on the road to a federal solution.⁸²

They were pushing uphill. The Committee had begun with considerable scepticism about the idea of federalism in Britain and the interventions of Sir Robert Menzies, former Prime Minister of Australia, were taken as decisive arguments against any kind of federal solution.⁸³ Nevertheless, the language of a 'home rule all round' solution, which had long been a minority strand within unionist thought, enjoyed wider purchase than just the young Turks of the Thistle Group. A number of witnesses to the Committee – including a team from the *Scotsman*, which had gone into print in support of a federal solution, D. M. Walker, the Regius Professor of Law at Glasgow University, and various Liberal politicians – endorsed similar approaches.⁸⁴ 'Federal' solutions were also proposed by a number of branches, for example in Kinross-shire and Aberdeenshire.⁸⁵ It was also the implied framework of Constituency Associations and individuals who worried that uneven devolution to Scotland was either manifestly unjust or would create further and more acute political problems and who sought 'a British not merely a Scottish solution'.⁸⁶ Both Lord Drumalbyn and Viscount Muirshiel provided closely argued memoranda to the Committee stating that legislating only for a Scottish Assembly would be both unsafe and unjust 'except within the context of similar regional devolution in England and Wales'.⁸⁷ Some form of 'devolution all round' was also the preferred option of the Earl of Dundee, who wrote to Heath immediately after

⁸¹ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/166, Minute of meeting on 11 Dec. 1969.

⁸² NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/167, 'Submission from the Thistle Group', n.d.; Acc. 11368/166, Minute of meeting, 19-21 Sept. 1969; Mitchell, *Conservatives and the Union*, pp. 53-4. For the history of federalism/home rule all round and the distinction between the two see Bogdanor, *Devolution*, pp. 44-50, 287-98.

⁸³ NLA, Menzies Papers, MS4936/24/450, Alec Douglas-Home to Kenneth Wheare, 11 Apr. 1969; Douglas-Home to Robert Menzies, 31 Mar. 1969.

⁸⁴ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/166, Minute of meeting, 2 May 1969.

⁸⁵ NLA, Menzies Papers, MS4936/24/450, 'Answers to the questionnaire by D. S. Erskine, Vice-Chairman of Kinross-shire Conservatives', n.d.; NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/167, 'Observations on the proposed Scottish Assembly by West Aberdeenshire CUA', n.d..

⁸⁶ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/167, 'Summary of the initial views of the Executive Committee of the West Dumbartonshire CUA', n.d.; Acc.11368/37, South Western Regional Council, 26 Nov. 1968.

⁸⁷ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/167, 'A Scottish Convention? A memorandum by the Rt Hon Viscount Muirshiel', n.d.; 'Note for Scottish Constitutional Committee by Rt Hon Lord Drumalbyn', n.d.

his speech urging the case that an Assembly be accompanied by proportional representation.⁸⁸

Within the space marked at each end by a unitary British patriotism and an ideological commitment to home rule all round and other constitutional innovations lay most of the Conservative responses to the proposals. As Kidd has argued this 'hybridity of the middle ground in Scottish political culture' has been the victim of a historiography polarized around positions of unionism and nationalism.⁸⁹ This hybridity was evident, of course, within parties as much as between them. Much the most common position was a hesitant welcome for rethinking the government of Scotland (often with caveat that this needed to encompass the whole of the UK) with concern over the tactical implications of Heath's proposals. A large majority of respondents were prepared to answer 'yes' to the very first question on the papers that had been circulated: 'Are changes needed in the institutions of government, particularly in Scotland?' The caveats increased in scale and complexity after this initial question. Some came to the conclusion that existing powers were sufficient or simply required some minor augmentation or presentational tweaking; others enthusiastically endorsed Heath's plans or expressed the desire to take them further.

IV

There was thus no consensus within the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party over how Scotland should best be governed or over the ideological implications of Heath's proposals at Perth. Where there *was* a more obvious sense of consensus was over the genesis, timing and presentation of these proposals. In part, these responses were linked to the more general malaise with formal politics, a widespread 'disaffection with traditional political polarities', which had been identified in both the Party's own Scottish research and across a range of political commentary in the later 1960s.⁹⁰ One term that featured time and again in Conservative responses was 'gimmick', a word that had increasingly made its journey from advertising into the political lexicon during the 1960s (it would appear in this guise in its first entry to the OED in 1972). Its prevalence exemplified a more general feeling of cynicism towards elected politicians, something seen, for example, in the plummeting public reputation of Harold Wilson both before and following devaluation of the pound. Indeed, accusations of 'gimmickry' and 'trickery' were something which Heath himself had made great use of in his attacks on the Prime Minister.⁹¹

⁸⁸ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/167, Earl of Dundee to Edward Heath, 18 May 1968.

⁸⁹ Kidd, *Union and Unionisms*, pp. 263-4.

⁹⁰ Bod. Lib., CPA, CCO500/50/1, 'Motivations behind Scottish Nationalism', p. 10. The meaning of this apparent disaffection with formal party politics is among the themes in Lawrence Black, *Redefining British Politics: Culture, Consumerism and Participation, 1954-70* (Basingstoke, 2010), chs 1, 7-8.

⁹¹ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, www.oed.com [accessed 24 June 2014]; Garnett, 'Planning', p. 215; Campbell, *Edward Heath*, pp. 223-4; Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London, 1993), pp. 503-9.

This sentiment was strong among the grassroots response. A couple of examples will suffice. North Aberdeen Conservative Association Executive Committee reported: 'A few of the members felt that the Scottish Assembly was in their opinion a "sop" to the Scottish Nationalists, and that we as a Party were merely trying to jump on the bandwagon; they went further when they described the proposal as a "gimmick" to be used at the next election'.⁹² In a similar vein Denny and Dunipace Conservative and Unionist Association asserted that: 'Rather than presenting a definite attempt to reconstruct the present system of representation in Scotland within the framework of the UK, the Declaration of Perth strikes us as being hastily drawn up, indefinite and entirely too "gimmicky" ... We find it merely a lame attempt to combat Scottish Nationalism'.⁹³

This was in part a local variant of a wider discontent with the style and shape of Heath's leadership and his approach to policy-making. Criticism was also, in part, a local manifestation of the perennial prickliness of constituency associations when faced with dictation from the centre. In the Scottish context, however, this was intimately linked to a wider crisis of organization and management. The Declaration of Perth was discussed within a fundamentally demoralized party and was, indeed, partially an attempt to improve upon party morale. It came after a number of years of restless reorganization and rebranding described above. A policy of centralization and professionalization, designed to improve prospects in Scotland, wrought severe damage on the social and cultural ties of the party at local level and replaced a name with strong indigenous political associations (Unionist) with one that seemed alien or, at least, English (Conservative).⁹⁴

One does not need to delve very deeply into the minutes of the Scottish organization to find examples of discontent with this centralizing trend. At the North Eastern Regional Council, for example, a member of the Women's Advisory Committee moved the following resolution in Autumn 1966: 'That this council deplores the lack of information or mention of Scotland or Scottish affairs in pamphlets from central office'.⁹⁵ The cause of the complaint was that while her committee had been studying education, CCO had provided a list of suggested reading. In one of the booklets mentioned there was absolutely no discussion of Scottish education; in another the subject was afforded two pages out of twenty-six. The following year the President of the SCUA wrote to all chairmen advising that funds would not sustain a structure of five regional councils beyond the end of 1968 and inviting responses to a proposed structure of three councils. Members were incandescent that the upheavals of 1965 should be followed so quickly by further proposals for reform and the Glasgow Regional Council broadened its critique:

⁹² NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/167, 'Report of Discussion by North Aberdeen CA Executive Committee on the Proposed Scottish Assembly', n.d..

⁹³ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/167, 'The Declaration of Perth: A note from Denny and Dunipace CUA', n.d..

⁹⁴ Seawright, *Important Matter*, chs 1, 7.

⁹⁵ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/38, North East Regional Council, 22 Oct. 1966.

The office bearers were extremely critical of the high level of expenditure at Central Office and found it difficult to comprehend recent appointments to the staff at Central Office immediately after a statement by the Chairman that the financial position of the Party was critical. They were also critical of the almost complete domination of the organisation in Scotland by Central Office and were of the view that greater emphasis should be placed on the Constituency organisations.⁹⁶

Such efforts were, of course, part of a much wider programme of professionalization which, took in the whole of the UK and was pursued through abortive schemes such as 'Project '67' and efforts to re-energize the Conservative Political Centre.⁹⁷ This last must have seemed particularly noxious. Barry Henderson was doing the rounds of the Regional Councils in the Spring of 1968, pointing to the Conservative Political Centre as a vehicle for the transmission of policy ideas from the constituencies to the leadership.⁹⁸ At the same time he was intimately involved in the preparations ahead of Heath's Declaration, an announcement which had not been presented for discussion in the constituencies at all. What is evident is that if these organizational efforts had only marginal success in England, they had a pretty catastrophic effect on the party in Scotland, for whom 'Central Office' had become shorthand for all of the iniquities of restless and disruptive restructuring throughout the 1960s.

V

The period between 1968 and 1973 saw the Conservative Party develop and endorse a policy of devolution via an elected Assembly in Scotland. We should not interpret this development as either the matured endpoint of a longstanding Conservative/Unionist engagement with decentralization and devolution or as a purely cynical and opportunistic deployment of a 'Scottish card' played in support of short-term electoral advantage and as a prophylactic against nationalism. It has been argued above that it was both of these, but that neither explains adequately the origins or outcomes of the policy. Crucial was the interaction of these two ways of thinking about Scotland's position with one another and with wider contexts provided by party change and political disenchantment.

This analysis has wider relevance, both for understanding how the Conservative Party navigated the 'Scottish question' during the 1970s and beyond and for assessing explanations for Conservative decline in Scotland in the late twentieth century. The Declaration of Perth and the discussions that followed helped to shape Conservative responses to future challenges. A policy which had divided opinion within the Scottish party and delivered few if any electoral benefits in 1970 provided a troublesome anchor when

⁹⁶ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/16, Glasgow Regional Council Executive Committee, 4 Sept. 1967.

⁹⁷ Bale, *Conservatives since 1945*, pp. 112-13.

⁹⁸ NLS, SCUA, Acc.11368/38, North East Regional Council, 23 Mar. 1968.

constitutional issues re-emerged, dramatically, from the middle of the 1970s.⁹⁹ Certainly, the multi-party context and the responses of other parties to nationalism left even less space for the development of Conservative solutions. In particular, following the recommendations of the Kilbrandon report and SNP electoral success at both general elections in 1974, the Labour Party remarkably quickly and with considerable success managed to establish its credentials as the party of devolution.¹⁰⁰

The Conservatives' earlier discussion carried certain implications for their party. First, it had served to establish battle-lines within the parliamentary party, which would harden across the decade. Pro-devolutionists (among them Malcolm Rifkind and Alick Buchanan-Smith) and anti-devolutionists (such as Iain Sproat and Betty Harvie-Anderson) had aired arguments and made commitments that were revived and extended after 1974. Second, while the Declaration of Perth and the report of the Constitutional Committee provided an easy and endlessly reiterated point – that the Conservative Party had begun its serious consideration of devolution well before the Labour Party – this brought its own problems.¹⁰¹ Intended as a bold move in 1968, the proposals embodied in the 1970 report represented the outer limits of what Conservative Party opinion could reasonably endorse. Thereafter the Conservatives were stuck with a lukewarm commitment to a scheme, which, by the mid-1970s, did not seem likely to be electorally appealing and remained divisive within the party itself. The room for manoeuvre was extremely limited and any bids to outflank Labour (such as the consideration of full federalism) seemed even less appealing. It was the last time that the Conservatives could or did 'set the agenda on the Scottish Question'.¹⁰²

Faced with a similar set of challenges to those they had met between 1966 and 1970 – a demoralized and divided party and an unenviable electoral landscape in Scotland and divisions among the wider parliamentary party – Conservative leaders after 1976 took different decisions and drifted further from both the commitment to devolution (as well as to other constitutional reforms) and from the party in Scotland itself. Further bouts of centralization in the party machinery did little to reverse trends highlighted above.¹⁰³

When the party moved against legislative devolution from 1976 onwards, the discussions and evidence gathered since 1968 furnished a ready repertoire of palatable alternatives, which could be dipped into and developed over the following decades. Further administrative devolution, including the provision for Scottish Grand Committee sittings to be held in Edinburgh as had been suggested by Ian Lang and others, followed in the

⁹⁹ For a detailed treatment, see Mitchell, *Conservatives and the Union*, chs 5-6. For contemporary comments see Geoffrey Smith, 'The Conservative Commitment to Devolution' and 'Devolution and not saying what you mean', *Spectator*, 19 and 26 Feb. 1977.

¹⁰⁰ William L. Miller, *The End of British Politics? Scots and English Political Behaviour in the Seventies* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 50-73, 118-28.

¹⁰¹ See, for examples, the speeches of Buchanan-Smith and Heath in *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 922, 14 and 16 Dec. 1976, 1291 and 1780-1.

¹⁰² James Mitchell and Alan Convery, 'Conservative Unionism: Prisoned in Marble', in Torrance (ed.), *Whatever Happened to Tory Scotland?*, p. 182.

¹⁰³ Bale, *Conservatives since 1945*, pp. 192-3, 206.

early 1980s.¹⁰⁴ There was some attempt to address what Selby Wright had called ‘psychologically and emotionally important’ issues, with Michael Forsyth’s tartan-clad repatriation of the Stone of Destiny in 1996 being only the most prominent example.¹⁰⁵ It was, however, a minor strand from among constituency responses – that the answer was to ‘re-establish pride in Britain’ – that furnished the rhetorical style of Thatcherism.

These considerations raise a final methodological point. In examining the electoral decline of Conservatism in Scotland, recent accounts have laid emphasis less upon social and economic change or shifts in the values and identities of voters and more upon changes in the presentation of the party and its policies in Scotland. A new narrative is now taking shape, in which the Conservative Party was hobbled by its own strategies at least as much as it was the hapless victim of forces beyond its control.¹⁰⁶ In terms of organization, measures of centralization alienated the party in Scotland from the 1960s onwards. In terms of rhetoric and presentation, an historic Unionism, with its strong appeal to Scottish nationality, lost out to the endorsement of a narrower unitary British patriotism, which held little attraction for many Scots. What we lack are adequate accounts of *how* the Conservative Party came to arrive at these positions on Scotland and thus of how the powerful legacy of Unionism came to be sidelined. Arguably these can best be provided by historians reconstructing the complex contexts and series of interactions between a number of groups – Conservative leaders in both Scotland and England, the research departments, polling organisations and policy groups, Conservative activists, constituency associations and voters more generally – at key moments. Such accounts would allow us to both broaden and deepen our explanations for the political demise of an historically successful Unionism. It may ultimately be true that ‘the assassin was Thatcher’, but she did not work alone.¹⁰⁷

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¹⁰⁴ Mitchell, *Conservatives and the Union*, p. 107.

¹⁰⁵ Mitchell and Convery, ‘Conservative Unionism’, p. 180.

¹⁰⁶ See, especially, Miller, ‘Death of Unionism?’, pp. 175-94. Even recent accounts which have sought to underline the importance of social change have accepted important parts of this narrative, see, for example, Richard Finlay, ‘Thatcherism, Unionism and Nationalism: A Comparative Study of Scotland and Wales’, in Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders (eds), *Making Thatcher’s Britain* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 165-79.

¹⁰⁷ Miller, ‘Death of Unionism?’, p. 185.